

5 STEPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMMING

PURPOSE: This operational instruction is provided to assist Air Force club managers in establishing and executing successful promotions and programs.

SCOPE: This guide applies to all club personnel.

GENERAL: Promotions and programs represent the fun factor, they represent themes, activities, events and incentives. They also provide a means for showcasing your products and services. A great promotion/program coupled with superb service and product will keep members and guest coming back.

GUIDANCE:

1. Formulating the Program.

- a. It is never too early to start, the sooner your start, the better. The ideal time is early spring, prior to the start of the budgeting process for the next fiscal year. However, anytime is a good time to capture those brilliant ideas! Write them in your Manager's Planner throughout the year.
- b. Find out what programs your members want – ask them! Be sure to get two kind of feedback: (1) talk to members one-on-one and in groups, (focus groups, advisory committees, spouses' clubs, commanders' calls, etc.), (2) review written feedback, (surveys, comment cards, etc.). Also, be sure to ask your customers how much they are willing to pay. Build a good working relationship with your Services marketing director. He/she can be a big help in researching the needs and desires of your market. Be aware of the support and sponsorship possibilities by maintaining close contact with manufacturers and distributor representatives that provide products and services to your operation. Use your time at trade shows (Orlando, Chicago, Long Beach etc.) to gain valuable market intelligence on what is popular and profitable in the civilian sector. Don't be afraid of using those ideas. If they work well outside the gate, chances are they can work for you too. Hospitality related workshops and training courses are another excellent source of programming information. Be sure to find out what other clubs are doing; e-mail is a great tool for this. Once you know what your market is interested in, develop the possibilities by "brain storming" with you team members.
- c. Use the standard "brainstorming" process (if you don't know how to lead it, ask your Services training manager for help). Keep a record of the details, you will need it later when it is time to fully develop the idea. Once you have determined your program idea and developed a full outline of details, you have completed the "**Formulating**" step. (If you are not the club manager, get him/her involved as soon as possible before you move to the planning stage.) Now you are ready to begin program planning.

2. Planning.

- a. Careful planning is essential for program success. It enables you to avoid unpleasant surprises later. Use the *Planning Worksheet for Special Events* and the *Programming-*

Building Business worksheets provided in the Programming for Success Workshop. (Note: These worksheets are also available in the “Tool Box” section of the *Manager’s Planner*.)

- b. Develop your strategy. Talk it over with staff and determine the delivery system and the products you wish to produce. Write down all plans to keep them alive in everyone’s mind. Discuss the program as if it were happening that minute. Your team has to believe in the program for it to be totally successful. This is the stage in which you should get the Services marketing staff involved. Be sure to consider the lead-time necessary for scheduling and advertising. Potentially great programs fail for lack of sufficient lead-time to make your market aware of your offerings. Implement a tracking sheet to monitor progress (use the *Planning Worksheet for Special Events*). Establish a date and use the event tracking calendars, in your Management Action Plan (MAP) and Marketing Objective Plan (MOP). Because this tool is computerized it is easy to update and manage. Select a primary and two alternate dates for your event. To reduce the potential of having event conflict, check these dates with off-base civilian agencies base units, and Services activities to see if any major programs are already scheduled for that date.
- c. Programs that compete for the same target audience are almost always doomed to failure, or at best they produce marginal success. Check the wing calendar, and the Services activity events calendars. Now you can have the basic market intelligence to select a date for your event that minimizes the potential for conflict. Choose the date and ensure your event is added to the Services events calendar (and the wing calendar as appropriate).

(1) Budgeting: Program budgets can range from zero to many thousands of dollars. Ideally, the money for your program is included as part of the club’s Income & Expense (I&E) Budget. This budget can be revised as needed on a quarterly basis. Begin with a relatively small and simple new program. This is an especially important consideration if you need a budget revision to include funding for a major program. Consider all costs when developing your budget. Find out what you have on-hand that can be used to support the program. Check with other Services activity managers to see if they have some of the items you need. You will be surprised what you can find for little or no cost.

(2) Ordering: Work through your NAF Prime Vendor to order food items on the contract. Explain your program and ask your Prime Vendor representative if he/she can locate one or more manufacturers that would be willing to come in and promote their product (taste testing) during your program. Work within their budgets and do not make unsubstantiated demands. Once you choose a product, let the distributor know you are committed to promoting their product(s) during this event. Use the Prime Vendor rebate guide and identify good quality products for your program that yield a case lot rebate. This one area alone has the potential to increase your annual profitability considerably. When working with your Prime Vendor, position yourself not just as a client, but as a partner. Determine a source and order all promotion materials and supplies well in advance of the program. Use the *Planning Worksheet for Special Events* to keep track of everything. Add to it to create your own customized checklist. Some items to track in your checklist are; who ordered it, when, from whom, the cost, and promised delivery date.

(3) Confirm: Ensure all items including entertainment (may need more lead time), food, beverage, supplies, and promotion materials are ordered at least 60 days in advance.

If you are in an overseas location you must allow a longer lead-time to ensure delivery. To avoid early use and potential pilferage of special event decorations and support materials, secure them in a designated place, and mark them for the specific event. Check with Marketing to ensure promotional materials are printed and distributed on time. Confirm the variety of media to be used for your program: television (overseas), publications, marquees, direct mail, club calendar, commanders' calls, newcomer's orientation, etc.

- (4) **Advertising:** Remember, your MAP and MOP provide an annual marketing plan. Share this information with your Services marketing staff. Keep everyone in the loop well in advance of any major event you plan. Begin making weekly checks/updates to your plan and to the required support items for your event at least 45 days out. Discuss the details with all involved. At the 30 day point begin displaying point of sale and advertising materials, i.e., banners, posters, marquee signage, and even some decorations to generate awareness of the event. Encourage your club team to personally invite members to attend. Increase your promotional blitz the closer you get to the event, with a dramatic flourish at the end. Ensure all club team members have the details so they can answer members' questions. Remember to **Promote! Promote! Promote!**

3. Controlling:

a. Authority, Assignments, and Accountability: The club manager delegates sufficient authority to the team members so they have the pride of "ownership" in the program. Appoint a team leader and funnel all details through this person. This individual is the program manager. In turn, the program manager assigns tasks to other team members and delegates the necessary authority to carryout these assignments. Provide a checklist to each person assigned a specific task (you may use the appropriate section of the *Planning Worksheet for Special Events*). The club manager meets regularly with the program manager and holds him/her accountable for accomplishing the delegated tasks. The program manager meets regularly with key team members and holds them accountable for completing their assigned tasks. Track everything! Use your checklist(s)!

b. Team Meetings and Work Details: Conduct the initial one-on-one meetings with team members assign key tasks starting about 75 days or more in advance. Review their specific task, give them their checklist, and go over it item-by-item with them (use the appropriate section of the *Planning Worksheet for Special Events*). Have a team meeting 30-45 days in advance to discuss overall program. Are there any problems? Make sure the responsible person knows the next step. Ask if anyone needs help. Establish work schedules and tasks lists ranging from the décor to the actual serving of the function, including clean up. The more supervisors and other team members know, the more excited they become about the upcoming program. Let everyone know when the promotional materials arrive. Use the entire team as your live "on-stage" advertising staff to drum up excitement and awareness.

c. Follow-up: Ensure the Kitchen Manager/Chef /Cook Foreman is made aware of the number of guests to prepare for. If walk-in traffic is expected for an event or program, then work together with the club manager to determine a "best guess" for the probable attendance, and design a menu that has a "second use potential" for unsold food items. Ensure all team members are informed of room set-up and serving requirements. Double-check and confirm

the number of team members needed to perform each job to accommodate the projected number of guests.

Pull out tracking sheet and checklists to ensure every detail is taken care of and to identify any last minute problems. Do this “double-check” not later than three workdays prior to the function. This gives you some time to work those little problem areas.

d. Support: The club manager must ensure the program manager has sufficient training, knowledge, and skill to successfully accomplish each task delegated to him/her. This may require the team member to attend some training or receive on-the-job-training (OJT) before being placed in-charge of the program. The club manager has the ultimate responsibility for “getting things done,” therefore, it is essential that he/she follow-up regularly with the program manager. Provide assistance as needed to resolve any trouble spots, and ensure all the specific tasks are on track for a successful program.

In turn, the program manager must ensure the team member assigned a task has sufficient training, knowledge and skill to successfully accomplish that task. This may require that the team member receive some on-the-job-training (OJT) to perform the task successfully. The program manager must not try to force team members to do a task they do not feel comfortable doing. Discuss these type situations with your supervisor or the club manager and get instructions on how to proceed.

4. Delivering: Conduct a team meeting 24-72 hours prior to the event and review planning checklists, work assignments, dress requirements, and program details. Conduct your final team meeting with everyone involved about 2 hours before start time. Review individual assignments, special needs of guests, protocol requirements, agenda changes, and remind everyone that they are about to go “on stage.” Preparation is over the curtain is going up. If you followed your checklists, did your follow-up, are offering a program your members want, and have your team committed to making the event the best it can be, then it should be a great success! Remember, have FUN and CREATE EXCITEMENT! Talk with your guests during and after the program to get their feelings on what you did right, and solicit their suggestions for improving the next one.

5. Evaluating and documenting: Hold a team meeting as soon as possible following the event (within 24 hours when possible). Be sure to include the kitchen manager or his/her representative in this meeting. Review the pros and cons. What went right? What went wrong? How can we improve the next time? Complete the *After Action Report*. Review each checklist item with the person responsible for it. Ensure you get all the details necessary to document what went well and where there were problems. Attach copies of the completed checklists to your *After Action Report*. The benefit of an honest critique is knowing that it will save you time and money the next time around. Capture as many details as possible. All things considered, is it worth doing again? Periodically? Regularly? What do we do differently? Who do we need to thank? In any case, it’s worth the time it takes to record the details. If the program was a flop, you need all the details to determine why. If you plan to repeat the program sometime in the future, this evaluation can reduce planning time, improve efficiency, and help you generate more revenue. Most importantly, improving programs helps you enhance member satisfaction!

SUMMARY: Properly executed promotions make holidays shine and transform the ordinary to the extraordinary. They give members and guests a reason to come into the club, and just as importantly, a reason to return.